

Pool Reopened After Safety Clearance

By PAULA MAXWELL

The town pool reopened Monday after an environmental waste company removed 30 gallons of hazardous chemicals and state environmental officials issued a safety clearance.

Recreation Director Gordon Cushing said, "We had clearance to reopen Friday but because the pool was shut down for three days, we needed to circulate the water with chemicals and get the pool back to the proper temperature."

The Percy Walker pool had been closed since the evening

of May 7 when seven members of a South Shore swim team were transported to local hospitals and dozens more were evacuated from the pool area when toxic fumes resulted from an improper chemical mix in the basement tanks.

Cushing said a local pool treatment company representative accidentally mixed sodium hypochlorite (chlorine) and sodium bisulfate in the pool's basement storage tanks causing the release of hydrochloric gases. The delivery was unau-

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thorized he said.

Seven members of Bernal's Gators swim team between the ages of 7 to 14 were transported by emergency crews and treated at and released from local hospitals. Three more were taken to hospitals later by parents. There were no serious injuries.

Coaches and recreation staff quickly cleared the pool after smelling fumes and called 911 at about 5:50 p.m. Several of the 50 student swimmers had trouble breathing and complained of burning eyes. Some were seen vomiting outside of the pool.

Fire Chief William Harriman immediately summoned the state's Hazardous Materials (HazMat) unit and a team from the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to assess the air quality situation at the pool.

Police Lt. Roger Banfill and a team of police roped off the pool area and assisted in evacuating homes across the street which were downwind of the toxic vapors.

Cushing explained the chain of events when a representative from Crystal Clear Pools showed up at the pool after 5 p.m. wanting to make an unscheduled chlorine delivery. Recreation staff told the delivery person they could not authorize any delivery after 5 p.m. and that regular deliveries required a certified pool operator to be on the site at the time.

Cushing said the town terminated its contract with Crystal Clear Pools of Kingston the following day after it was determined that the unauthorized delivery resulted in the emergency situation.

The operator from Crystal may have had a leak in the truck tank Cushing said, and was trying to deliver chlorine in order to empty it quickly. He said he learned that the pool representative had attempted to deliver

to Camp Wing but was told there that the pool tanks had just recently been filled.

Cushing said that what apparently happened was that the operator went ahead and filled sodium hypochlorite (chlorine) into a basement tank that already contained sodium bisulfate, a substance used to control PH levels in the pool water. The combination immediately caused a chemical reaction emitting strong toxic smoke-like vapors which cause respiratory difficulties, throat irritation and watery eyes.

All of those treated at hospitals received oxygen to clear their lungs and facilitate breathing.

"As far as we're concerned, this delivery was unscheduled and unauthorized. All expenses associated with the cleanup and emergency have been forwarded to the company, which we believe was negligent," said Cushing. "Luckily no one was seriously hurt and for that we credit the quick response of our pool attendants who evacuated the pool immediately and called 911."

"We are very careful about monitoring this facility, and making sure that certified pool operators oversee deliveries. This never should have happened," he said. "Our pool attendants told the delivery person deliveries could not be authorized without management approval."

Town Manager Rocco Longo said Tuesday that he is hopeful the pool company will pick up the expense for the emergency and cleanup without any problems.

He credited town employees including Cushing and pool attendants Nick Merry and Tim Reimer. "I can't say enough about the emergency response to what could have been a very bad situation. Luckily the pool attendants, Gordon and emergency teams reacted quickly and everyone is apparently ok."